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ABSTRACT

College summer institutes should be allowed to coach high school debaters on the current high school debate topic. Every individual forensic practice must be viewed as part of a dynamic process, the totality of which ought to be assessed for its competitive and educational balances. The activity of debate becomes endangered not when students allow competitive motivation to coexist with educational achievement, but when the total process no longer produces educational benefits. The fundamentals of forensics should be introduced during the school year, allowing summer institutes to provide advanced courses that build upon these basics. Furthermore, the conduct of summer institutes can only reflect that of competitive forensics contests held during the school year. The following policy positions are appropriate for high schools and summer forensic institutions: (1) the word "allowed" should be rejected from the issue--workshops may teach whatever they choose; (2) teaching and coaching should be balanced in summer institutes; (3) educators must strive to improve the level of instruction in the fundamentals of debate in the high school; (4) any assessment of summer institutes must include a sound appreciation of their inherent weaknesses; and (5) both parties should strive for both excellent teaching and coaching throughout the year. (JD)

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THE DEBATE COACH AND THE DEBATE TEACHER: FRIENDS OR FOES?

COLLEGE SUMMER INSTITUTES SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO COACH HIGH SCHOOL DEBATERS ON THE CURRENT HIGH SCHOOL DEBATE TOPIC

A Position Paper for the National Forensic League Conference on the State of Debate

Kansas City, Missouri

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Before undertaking a thorough examination of the announced subject matter of this paper I should like to introduce one initial observation. While the purpose of this Conference deals with the "State of Debate" and this specific paper will deal with the desirability of summer institute utilization of the current high school debate topic, I must confess that such a limitation may be somewhat inappropriate. For a number of years several major summer institutes have also offered extensive instruction in various Individual Events. Certainly this movement has recently received major impetus with the sponsorship of a major national individual events institute by the National Forensic League itself. I raise this matter beacuse upon examining Professor Kalmon's presentation it strikes me that many of his arguments have equal, if not greater, force when applied to an institute setting where a student will utilize a specific oration or dramatic or humorous cutting for that institute and for the remainder of the competitive year. Indeed, I will find it applicable to draw such analogies during the course of my own presentation. I should hasten to add that while I do not agree with these indictments, I feel that they paint with a broader argumentative brush than simple confinement to summer institute debate experiences, and that if accepted, corresponding remedies ought to be imposed.

In arguing for the ability, not the necessity, of summer institutes to coach high school debaters on the current high school debate topic I take that position to be fairly described in debate terms as the status quo or present system. Hence I also, in accord with the debate theorists in whom Professor Kalmon reposes so much trust, take it that the burden of proof is upon those who would change or alter this system. In that framework I will begin my own analysis by examining the case or need for a change put forward in the Kalmon paper.

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At the root of the problem is what Professor Kalmon labels "the tension between educational and competitive goals" which is typified in our current utilization of summer forensics institutes. Most of our individual practices are seen as a battleground between these two contestants with the competitive all too often overpowering the educational. In my own view the problem with this sort of analysis, and it most assuredly is not confined to this particular paper, is that it views each individual forensics practice or activity as a stop action photograph in which the subject is fully examined in isolation to determine whether or not educational or competitive goals have predominance. To the extent that one can determine educational aims playing a subordinate role in this single photograph, then that particular practice is condemned. Such static analysis is, I would contend, entirely incorrect. Rather every individual forensic practice--whether an institute, a handbook, a theoretical strategy, or a tournament structure--must be viewed as part and parcel of a dynamic process, the totality of which ought to be assessed for its competitive and educational balances. To require that each and every action contain educational superiority seems manifestly at odds with common experience within our own activity as well as elsewhere. Would one seriously contend that the 50th or 60th presentation of a particular dramatic or humorous cutting in a competitive round of a tournament is majorly an educational experience? Surely, by far the vast majority of the educational benefits to be gained in selecting the cutting, perfecting the interpretation, and gaining in confidence with public presentation have long since past. Such later rounds are essentially competitive experiences. And well they should be! Similarly, one can argue that a contestant in high school or college athletics gains large physical advantages through his participation in sports. True, but most of these are available through work in the "training camp." The actual games reverse the balance, emphasizing the competitive over the physical. Similarly, surely the initial research, case construction, argument presentation and adaptation are far more educationally sound, even without any institute at all, then the 70th or 80th debate during the year.

Please do not misunderstand my purpose. I have little doubt that there is some educational benefit in every part of the forensic process. But, and this is a major qualifier, it seems clear that the balance between the educational and the competitive is a constantly shifting one--and very often, and very rightly, the competitive goals will predominate in individual instances. Indeed, quite often these two goals are not at all in the conflict which Professor Kalmon perceives. Rather it is the possibility of competitive success which provides the ongoing motivation for students to engage as fully as possible in the educational process. Just as academic grades, class average, or test scores are not at odds with the actual accumulation of knowledge, so too trophies and victories provide rationales for engaging in what may even be subconscious learning experiences. Only the real purists will frown upon such solied motivations. Yet do we really believe that our students enter the final round of a tournament saying, "I am here to learn," or "Who cares about these victories, I want intellectual advancement." No they do not; and more importantly in no way should they feel "dirty" or in need of apology because of their competitive natures. I would contend that the activity

becomes endangered not when students often allow competitive motivation to coexist with educational achievements, but when the total process no longer produces significant educational benefits. This I believe is far from true.

Within that context I must comment upon a second presumption of Professor Kalmon's paper, namely that "the central purpose of the summer programs...is that they teach the fundamentals of forensics." Put in a most generous context such a statement seems clearly incomplete; more accurately, it is simply incorrect. As indicated previously, such a view of summer institutes exhibits a seriously limited vision. Given the substantial variety of institute structures which constitute the institute community, so to speak, I see little way one could characterize the "central purpose" of anything approaching all of them as the conveyance of forensic fundamentals. Certainly one can perceive how one institute which limits its enrollments to potential seniors with extensive experience in restricted numbers for 5 weeks as opposed to another which accepts largely novices for 5 days might have quite different gaols. Indeed depending upon a host of qualifying factors which would surely include factors such as the quality and experience of its staff, the prior experience and talent of its student body, the length of time of its program, the previous institute experience of its own students, including returning members, and the presence or absence of significant research facilities such as libraries, each individual institute will probably vary as to its announced and intended "central purpose." Indeed, many of the larger summer programs, when subjected to more sophisticated analysis will be found to be so monolithic. The fact is that often they are actually many separate institutes, with different groups dealing with different students in different ways. This is not to suggest that the "fundamentals" are not important; but surely their transmission is only one of many educationally desirable goals of such programs. (I make these statements without a clear definition of the term "fundamentals of forensics" by Professor Kalmon. It is, of course, possible that his definition would be sufficiently broad to include many sophisticated elements of total strategic and theoretical constructs. In which case both of our points would be somewhat diminished).

Beyond merely alleging a degree of inaccuracy in this description I would very strongly contend that it should not become an accurate goal statement. It would seem to me that the thousands of talented high school professional teachers and coaches "at home" are by far best suited to the transmission of the "fundamentals of forensics." They particularly have the time, the patience, the personal relationship with their own students to most beneficially impart a sound fundamental basis of forensics to their charges. Surely there is something topsey-turvey about a world in which a student will journey hundreds or thousands of miles away from home to a highly intensive, concentrated program staffed by largely outstanding college coaches and debaters to receive training in the "fundamentals" only to return to his home town to expect to receive highly specific advanced theoretical and subject matter instruction from his local coach. Indeed , Professor Kalmon cites approvingly the availability of university library facilities. Surely these are not viewed as advantageous because they are well stocked with the latest books on debate. The fact is that summer institutes by and large constitute potentially effective advanced courses in forensics which build upon the foundations available within the regular educational processes which high school students can obtain from their own coaches and teachers. Most assuredly the reverse process, in which the institutes provide the fundamentals and the regular coach the advanced approaches does not correspond to forensic reality. Nor should it. As suggested above such a process would make poor utilization of the potential human and material resources

available at both the institutes and the normal high school program.

Professor Kalmon then offers, as to most critics, the all too frequent laundry list of "problems" with institute conduct. So we hear again and again that institutes promote "evidence and argument shortcuts," that they "approach the topic strategically rather than analytically," that winning is promoted "at the expense of developing a competition ethic," and that, of course, they "fail to teach fundamental forensic skills," etc., etc., etc., etc., etc. I would offer two primary comments concerning such a list of indictments. First, they are in no way universal. Indeed. Professor Kalmon himself cites what he would view as commendable examples of institute innovation or sound practices. Now we might well disagree about each and every practice set out; but the fact is that each institute is substantially sui generis. And this is as it should be. Students and coaches should be able to "shop around" and make their own choices and emphases. Moreover, on the part of the institutes this is surely an exercise in intellectual freedom most appropriate to the spirit of open and argumentative inquiry which debate is designed to foster. Even more importantly, it seems to me that these indictments are first and foremost indictments to the actual conduct of competitive forensics contest during the regular school year. The institutes do not cause these situations, rather they reflect them. The institutes are simply a microcosm of the general conduct of the activity. With all due respect to high school educators such as Professor Kalmon the place to begin reform is not with the institutes--I realize they are an intellectual and professionally comfortable, easy source of blame--but with the practices which charactize forensic competition "back home" on your own turf. There is no way that the institutes, grounded as they are in their supposed competitive assistance will continue to grow and prosper unless they better equip students to succeeed during the year. If the institutes are at odds with the professional standards and judgement of the community as expressed during the year, then they will change. But, and this is the central "but," all of the indictments set out in this paper must first be dealt with "at home" and then eliminated "abroad." Not vice versa. (there are far, far more handbooks sold to students and schools on an individual mail order basis back home, then there are at the institutes).

The same type of what I can only characterize as intellectual laziness and responsibility can be found in the numerous "solutions" offered in this paper. Indeed, while not a high school coach myself I find its central rhetoric rather insulting to the profession. Professor Kalmon advises that we should"seek as much as possible to put coaching aside for the summer." As if "coaching" conveyed some lesser, almost intellectually prostituted practice. Indeed, if all of the evils which are cited in this paper are a product of "coaching," then thousands of us are in deep trouble. Indeed, this view of "coaching" is simplisticly rooted in the nature of any topic and any strategic work ever done. I read all of Professor Kalmon's problems as to what the "institutes" do and finally realized that they serve as a description of virtually every tournament which is conducted throughout the year. Indeed, I would see all of Professor Kalmon's concerns addressed only if there was no national topic at all. The source of these problems is not the presence of topic instruction at the institutes it is topic presence and focus period. And the reason for this is, as outlined before, the central failure to appreciate that competition and some of its admitted excesses are not per se evils, but rather work with and contribute to a separate educational process. Professor Kalmon's world carried to its most pristine and logical conclusion is not a world without nationally topic focused institutes, it is a world without a topic and without tournaments at all. Surely then we could have the best of actual education without fear of competitive contamination.

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In light of thse comments what "policy" positions do I feel are appropriate for the high school community and for summer forensic institutes? First, I would categorically reject the uniform "rulemaking" parameters suggested in the wording of the question as to whether college summer institutes should be "allowed" to coach high school debaters on the current national high school debate topic. As I noted earlier it strikes me that in any society dedicated to free speech and to learning through controversial discussion and debate there can be no question that institutes must be allowed to teach what they wish.

Whether such teaching practices are desirable is a second, independent question. My own view is highly colored by the values I perceive of in a free market system. By this I mean that I perceive very substantial advantages in a system in which some institutes utilize direct coaching on the topic and others do not. A system in which some institutes concentrate upon "fundamentals" and others do not. This system offers students and coaches alike a choice of what nature and level of instruction they prefer.

Third, I would urge that any and all reforms against the evils of spread debating, handbooks and briefs, competitive "tricks" etc. focus first upon the day to day competitive operations of the high school debate community. This Conference has been wisely called to discuss the "State of Debate." That "State" is above all a matter of the educational-competitive environment in which the activity flourishes or perishes "back home." The institutes first economic and educational goal is to improve the performance of their students within that environment. If that environment is altered, whether through professional rulemaking power or through concerted professional coaching influence, the institutes will rapidly adjust their own practices and philosophies.

Fourth, I believe that any assessment of the instutes must be built upon a very sound appreciation of their inherent strength and weaknesses. Professor Kalmon's admonition that institutes should "teach more and coach less"--as he defines those terms--really reverses the proper role of the entire process. For, as I previously noted, given a distinction between "teaching" and "coaching" it is surely the institutes which ought to focus upon coaching and the high school professionals upon teaching.

Perhaps most importantly I would simply reiterate my initial comments concerning the dynamic, motivational role of competition within forensics. It as far too often artificial to draw clear distinctions in which "educational" values are identified in clear form as opposed to "competitive" practices. The total process operates in a far more integrated fashion, one in which competitive-educational balances are constantly being redefined. The fact is, that when it is all completed the students whom I have observed at institutes and not at institutes consistently emerge from this great activity as real winners. They have learned a great deal about sound argumentative theory and practice, and they have learned a great deal about a number of complicated "real world" subject areas--the national topics--and they have done so in a competitive envoronment which has not merely taught them how to win and lose with grace and wisdom, but also has provided the central motivation for their efforts in the first place. We do not require "more teaching" and "less coaching." What all of us could profitably utilize is both good teaching and good coaching throughout the entire year. Our students deserve it of us.